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Washington Times

# Moon Paper: Significant D.C. Forum

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WASHINGTON—For those who monitor status in this town by tracking guest lists and reception lines—and many do—the seating arrangements at the recent White House Correspondents banquet offered hard evidence of the changing role of the Washington Times, the flamboyant newspaper financed by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

Last year, the highest-ranking Administration officials to grace the Washington Times table were the director of the U.S. Information Agency and the secretary of the Air Force.

This year, the journal Washington once dismissed as the "Moonie Paper" rated Atty. Gen. Edwin Meese III, National Security Adviser Robert C. McFarlane, former Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. and Energy Secretary John S. Herrington.

## Circulation of 83,000

Over the last three years—and particularly during President Reagan's second term—the paper the Korean evangelist founded as part of his conservative global war on communism has become a significant forum in the world's most powerful city.

Although it has a circulation of just 83,000 and is losing tens of millions of dollars, the Washington Times has been embraced by the conservative movement; it is especially well read at the White House, where Reagan has given it his public endorsement.

"Everybody here (in the White House) gets it. Everybody here reads it," said Patrick J. Buchanan, Reagan's director of communications and a former syndicated columnist whose work appeared in the paper. "The Washington Times is taken seriously."

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Despite such controversial political activities as a campaign to raise funds for the Nicaraguan *contras*, the newspaper now is read out of necessity by liberals and conservatives, and monitored by other news operations because Administration sources leak exclusive stories to it.

## Medium for Special Interests

Because of such leaks, the Washington Times was first with Administration reports that Soviet combat advisers had been spotted alongside Nicaraguan troops in areas of contra activity. It was also the first to publish allegations that House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.) had deliberately manipulated the date of a vote on aid to the *contras* in order to block the proposal.

The paper has even become a way for special interests—usually conservative—to shape the news agenda of other media, and stories that might be disregarded or run merely as part of larger stories elsewhere today are getting banner play in the Washington Times.

"Certain sources choose to give them exclusives," admitted Leonard Downie Jr., managing editor of the Washington Post. "On occasion, yes, we have followed those stories ourselves because they come from legitimate documents of a newsworthy nature."

By traditional business standards, the paper is hardly a success. The Washington Times' national edition, for instance, has just 9,000 subscribers. Advertising lineage in both editions is lean. And in its first 2½ years, according to internal documents, the paper lost \$150 million.

In its avowed political purpose of becoming a force in Washington, however, the paper has fared far better. The Washington Times was founded in May, 1982, as part of the Unification Church's "battle against what it sees as the ultimate enemy of human values and freedom—communism," according to a Washington Times promotional booklet.

Initially, suspicion existed over Moon's motives and the prospect of a controversial evangelical sect gaining political influence. Moon was convicted of tax evasion in 1982 and is now serving an 18-month sentence.

## Suspicion Intensifies

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sisted that the paper was funded simply by businesses in which Moon associates had directorships. Later, when Whelan was fired over business differences with the owners, he charged that Unification Church members were asserting too much control.

Today, the Washington Times' new editor-in-chief, Arnaud de Borchgrave, says he "can live quite comfortably" with Moon's politics. He also says he agrees with Unification Church claims that Moon is a victim of U.S. "political persecution."

"The Rev. Moon is in jail because of his convictions, because he represents a worldwide anti-communist crusade," De Borchgrave said. "No question about that. . . . He is an anti-communist, and that seems to be a crime in our society today."

Today, the Unification Church's ownership is much less of a problem for the newspaper than it once was. Both conservatives and liberals say the newspaper shows little evidence of Moon's religious crusade—only his political conservatism.

## In Tune With Current Mood

Moreover, the Washington Times' avowed conservative purpose and aggressive criticism of other media—especially the rival Washington Post—as too liberal have matched the conservative swing in Washington.

"Were there no move to the right, no Reagan Revolution, there would have been no position from which the Washington Times could have been nurtured," said John Buckley, former deputy press secretary to the Reagan campaign and now press deputy for Rep. Jack Kemp (R-N.Y.).

"Now, it has really become an important source of communications among conservatives," Buckley said. "It covers the conservative movement in detail and reports on things important to conservatives that might be overlooked elsewhere."

Most important, the paper has won Reagan's repeated endorsement. After reelection, for instance, the President granted his first exclusive post-election interview to the Washington Times, and said that he read the paper every morning. In a Rose Garden address last summer, he advised students

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from the National YMCA Youth Governor's Conference to read that morning's Washington Times to learn about geopolitics.

The paper also influences the President. In accepting the nomination for reelection in Dallas last year, Reagan used material from Washington Times columnist Warren Brookes on the impact of Reagan's budget cuts. Brookes says he often receives calls from White House aides asking for more information because the President had clipped one of his columns and was interested.

Once the President and his staff were known to be readers, the Washington Times' news and commentary pages became important—a place where one might influence the President, or at least anticipate his thinking.

"I began picking it up when I began knowing full well that it had the blessings of the White House," said Bob Neuman, former communications director of the Democratic National Committee and now a Washington public affairs consultant.

Once it had the President's imprimatur and began to be used by some Administration officials as a forum in which to break stories, the Washington Times began to have an impact on other media. Even though some journalists consider the paper to be a polemical journal, most of the major news bureaus in town now monitor it each day.

### Disinformation Network Cited

However, the paper often runs stories about which most other media are skeptical. The Washington Times, for instance, was entirely alone in running a five-part series alleging that communist interests have constructed a disinformation network in the United States to dupe the American media. (The existence of such massive disinformation operations was the premise of De Borchgrave's own best-selling book, "The Spike.")

"Intelligence experts call it 'The Network'—a massive but almost invisible spider's web of hundreds of left-wing groups and organizations, linked together by sinewy threads of personnel, ideology and politics, and seeking dramatic changes in the social, economic and political policies of the United States government," the series be-

gan. "And now, The Network has focused all its attention and resources on its latest target: President Reagan's Latin American policy."

"You still try to break big stories elsewhere, but there are some stories of more parochial interests to conservatives that only the Washington Times will cover, but if they have general news value they will get picked up," said Kemp press secretary Buckley.

### Questionable Stories Surface

At times, stories with more questionable news value get picked up from the paper as well. On May 17, the Washington Times' lead story—played with a banner headline across page 1—concerned a speech to be given the next day by CIA Director William J. Casey about U.S. policy in Latin America, reported from "an advance copy of the speech obtained . . . by the Washington Times."

The Washington Times called the speech "the most comprehensive argument for U.S. assistance to the Nicaraguan resistance yet put forward by the Reagan Administration."

But when the Associated Press called the CIA for comment while rewriting the story for its wire, it discovered that Casey had delivered the same speech more than two weeks earlier to the Metropolitan Club of New York.

Washington Times editors and the paper's supporters say the paper's different story selection and slant on the news are simply a necessary balance to the Washington Post, which they consider biased and liberal.

On occasion, it is true the same event is covered quite differently by the two papers and judging the accuracy of either is difficult.

A hearing on Capitol Hill on international terrorism, for instance, was covered on Page 1 of the Washington Times and began by saying, "Increasingly violent international terrorists are selecting new targets among Americans abroad. . . ." The Post ran the story inside and began with, "The Reagan Administration's counter-terrorism programs may lead to the killing of innocent bystanders on occasion. . . ."

"If you think about whether the news presentation is designed to

report on policy or affect policy, in that sense it seems to me there is a difference in the news presentation between the Washington Times and other papers," said Bill Kovach, the New York Times' Washington bureau chief. "The editorial decisions at the (Washington) Times are more ideological."

Even some Republicans said the paper favors the interests of the more extreme so-called New Right over other conservatives. "They definitely reflect the Kemp-Gingrich wing of the party," said an official from the Senate Republican leadership, referring to Kemp and Rep. Newt Gingrich, a conservative Republican from Georgia.

This question of ideology has intensified since the hiring in March of De Borchgrave as the Washington Times' new editor-in-chief.

De Borchgrave, Newsweek's former chief foreign correspondent, is a theatrical globe-trotter who once boasted that he kept the combat fatigues of 12 nations in his closet so that he could dash to wars on a moment's notice.

He was fired from Newsweek in 1980, because, he suggests, of his politics and his perceptions about communist manipulation of the media. Newsweek sources said the magazine in part had begun to worry that De Borchgrave had become too close to his sources in international intelligence circles.

De Borchgrave has made such changes at the paper as setting up a fund to pay reporters \$1,000 bonuses for what he calls "bell-ringer" stories.

He has attracted the most attention in his new job, however, for his political activities rather than his journalistic ones. In March he offered a \$1-million reward for information leading to the arrest, trial and conviction of Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele. In May he launched a fund in the paper's name to raise \$14 million in aid for the contras in Nicaragua, a response to what he considered Congress' moral failure to authorize the contras aid.

Even Downie at the Post said he thinks the paper has become more lively under De Borchgrave. And many conservatives, Buckley said, "have a certain amount of tolerance" for such initiatives as the Nicaraguan aid fund because they support the paper in general.

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Many other journalists, however, find the Nicaraguan aid initiative utterly improper for a newspaper, including, according to insiders, some staff members at the Washington Times.

"This is absolutely appalling for a newspaper to do," said Los Angeles Times Washington Bureau chief Jack Nelson. "It really has become a different newspaper in the last year. I no longer think it has much credibility." Nelson also said he thinks the Washington Times now "is almost a house organ for the Reagan Administration."

De Borchgrave, in part to quell questions on his own staff, posted a message on the office bulletin board: "Some of our left-wing detractors will doubtless ask whether it is the role of a newspaper to kill people. The question has no relevance to what is being done here. Let's put the question another way. Should the French have aided George Washington so the United States could come into existence? Should we have aided the French resistance against the Nazis? . . . Of course we should have aided people fighting for freedom."

#### **Admits Conservativeness**

De Borchgrave believes that most journalists not only share a liberal ideological agenda, but also are trying to further that agenda in their newspapers and broadcasts. "I find it extraordinary for (Washington Post editor) Ben Bradlee to go around saying he's not a liberal," De Borchgrave said. "Why is he ashamed of being a liberal? I mean, I have many liberal friends. . . . And I'm a conservative. I'm not ashamed of it."

"There seems to be increasingly in our society censorship by omission," De Borchgrave said. "Stories are deliberately ignored or buried because they might change perceptions in a way the self-anointed opinion molders might disapprove

of."

It adds up, De Borchgrave suggested, so that "We in the media seem to be spreading the plague of self-hatred. America the racist. America the exploiter. America the uncompassionate. America on the wrong side of history. I'm getting tired of that."

Many wonder what will happen to the Washington Times when a Democratic Administration next returns to power.

Syndicated columnist Jody Powell, who served as press secretary to Jimmy Carter, suggested that "their coverage would shift much more to the Hill and the Republican opposition there," if Democrats took power. "But the tension among the various right-wing philosophies would become greater," once Reagan is gone, "and the question would be which right-wing philosophy are they representing."

Others, however, agree with Stephen Hess of the Brookings Institution that the paper "could become an important back channel of opposition," and a permanent fixture on the conservative side in official Washington.